

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Alice C. Jennings, February 12, 1872, with transcript

ORIGINAL PLACED IN "THE DEAF"—Volume 8 Copy of a letter written by Dr. Alexander Graham Bell to Miss Alice C. Jennings, Auburndale, Massachusetts, Feb. 12, 1872
Melville House, Brantford, Ontario, Feb. 12, 1872 Miss Alice C. Jennings Auburndale
Massachusetts Dear Miss Jennings:

The least I can do in return for the very beautiful note you sent me is to answer it.

You ask me to assist you in marking out a course of study "for the winter," and lo! — the winter has passed before I set pen to paper! I am ashamed of myself for having delayed so long. Procrastination truly is a terrible fault. Be assured that my silence arose from no want of interest.

When I think of our various conversations in Newton, I am astonished at my presumption in "lecturing" you about anything. I should become a little more perfect myself, before criticising others.

I trust you may be enabled to make some use of the two books Miss Fuller handed to you. I shall not want them till my return to Boston in the fall.

That any objections can be found to the study of Physiology — is to me incomprehensible.

The study is a worthy one, if for no other reason than to become acquainted with those laws of health upon the due observance of which our very life itself depends ; but, to a thoughtful mind, far higher and nobler reasons will suggest themselves.

The very possession of a mind seems to me to be a sufficient reason why it should be used.

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Faculties are our “talents” for the proper employment of which we are accountable.

The faculty of Reason, I am sure, can never be better employed than in investigating the wonderful works of Creation.

2

Physiology, Geology, Physical Geography and especially Astronomy — are subjects calculated to enlarge our minds, and to give us grander and loftier ideas of the Author of all things.

The study of Nature is undoubtedly one of the most interesting of all pursuits. As Shakespeare says, we may find “Sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything.” God has strewn our paths with wonders, and we should certainly not go through Life with our eyes shut. But still Intellect is only one of the “talents” with which we have been entrusted.

Mental pursuits, if persevered in to the exclusion of other things, lead us out of the region of real life. We all know the story of the man who, gazing up at the stars, did not see the well at his feet — and paid the penalty with his life. How many there are who sacrifice body to mind; — and fall into early graves, through neglect of their own physical necessities! And how many others there are — who, (from the mind being engrossed in some pursuit apart from real life) come to consider this beautiful world — (most evidently designed for the happiness of mankind) — as only a wearisome place of trial — a place of sorrow and of bitter grief — and look upon life as a burden !

We look at life through coloured glasses — through the medium of our own thoughts and feelings. No combination of outward circumstances can make a man happy or miserable. Happiness lies in the individual , and not in the world.

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Hence the necessity of educating the heart as well as the mind — and in becoming interested in what interests others.

But where am I wandering to? I intended merely to answer your query concerning “Physiology and kindred subjects,” and here I am in the middle of a sermon!

3

Your article on 1871 (just published in the ‘Silent World’) shows me how utterly unnecessary my remarks on study have been heretofore — and I will not now try your patience by enlarging on the subject. I think that Dr. Blake's idea of using the galvanic current, may be of service to you in strengthening the weak side of your face. I should like to know whether you have tried this — and whether you have been benefitted.

Of course you know that Theresa Dudley is here. She is improving every day. She desires to be remembered to you. I have already taken up so much space that I must leave your query regarding rhythm unanswered.

Give my kind regards to your mother — and to Mr. and Mrs. Parker. I am glad to hear from Miss Fuller that your health is again restored.

Yours sincerely, (signed) A. Graham Bell P.S. Please do not scrutinize this epistle too much as I have no time to write carefully. I enclose the card (?) I promised you long ago. A.G.B.

The following is copied from a card enclosed with this letter —Married July 11th, 1877 to Miss Mabel Hubbard

As you use Time, Eternity will thee: Time is the childhood of Eternity.

Dec. 1, 1871 A.G.B.

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“As o'er the cold sepulchral stone Some name arrests the passer by Thus when thou
viewst this page alone May mine attract thy pensive eye.

“And when by thee that name is read Perchance in some succeeding year Reflect on me
as on the dead And think my heart is buried here.”

Byron A.E. Eustaphieve New York